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# Water in Pasco wells safe to drink, says EPA

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Concentrations of chemicals found in wells near the Pasco landfill were so minute that they would not harm people who drink from the wells, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Three organic compounds that may have seeped from the landfill were detected in October samplings of seven drinking wells, said EPA spokeswoman Jean Baker on Friday.

But Baker said the concentrations in the wells were so low that they could not be accurately measured by EPA equipment.

The compounds are considered cancer-causing for animals, but have not been proven to cause cancer in humans.

The announcement of the lab findings was made Friday in Seattle by Robie G. Russell, Northwest administrator for the EPA.

The wells were tested after the EPA reported in September that two cancer-causing chemicals were found in test wells in and around the Pasco landfill in concentrations above federal drinking-water guidelines.

The EPA was originally concerned that the landfill was seeping dangerous chemicals because it had been leased for the disposal of materials that are now considered hazardous, such as the herbicide 2,4-D.

No leakage has ever been directly linked to the landfill, which is located west of Pasco near Lewis Road and Highway 395, just a few miles from the Snake and Columbia rivers.

While the compounds found in the drinking wells were similar to the cancer-causing chemicals found in the test wells, the small concentrations pose no health threat, said Lori Cohen, Northwest site manager for the EPA Superfund program.

Because the chemicals are similar, they may have come from similar sources, said Cohen. But it has yet to be determined if the contaminants are from the landfill.

"Our lab could detect they were there but could not measure them. And there is not enough data to make the link to the landfill," Cohen said.

The nearest drinking-water wells are a half-mile from the landfill.

The chemicals found in the drinking wells are 111 trichloroethane, trichloroethene and tetrachloroethene, she said.

The compounds, which are found in many products, were found in concentrations of 1 to 3 parts per billion.

Cohen said there currently are no federal standards for those compounds in drinking water, but the EPA is about to propose some.

For the first compound, the proposed standard is 200 parts per billion. But the drinking water

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guidelines for trichloroethene and tetrachloroethene are proposed at 5 parts per billion.

Because the proposed standards on those two compounds are very low, she said the EPA continues to be concerned with keeping track of any changes in the level of the chemicals in Pasco wells.

The EPA also sampled a nearby irrigation well and found three organic compounds in similarly low concentrations.

Two of the compounds were the same as those in the drinking wells and the third was 1,1-dichloroethane.

"The levels are not regarded by EPA as presenting any reason why the well cannot continue to be used safely for irrigation," said Russell.

The EPA report also noted that the drinking water samples were "generally high" in sodium and any person on a sodium-restricted diet should be made aware of those levels.

As another precaution, Cohen said the EPA will recheck the drinking wells in February to make sure the level of contaminants has not increased.

Cohen said the EPA does not consider the Pasco landfill an emergency site for cleanup, but has placed it on a long-term plan for monitoring.

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